

Transforming a Provincial City; the Pilbeam Mayoralty in Rockhampton 1952-1982

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Abstract

Rockhampton City's colourful and controversial Alderman Rex Pilbeam, qualified public accountant and secretary, longest-serving mayor (1952-82) of any Australian city, took office when Rockhampton was burdened with heavy municipal debt, poor quality roads, costly water supply, little sewerage, and few recreational facilities. However, Pilbeam's vision, single-minded devotion, unflagging energy, political skill, and managerial flair brought a dramatic turnaround in the city's fortunes. Continuing after retirement with voluntary community service until his mid-eighties, the Pilbeam legacy to Rockhampton is everywhere in evidence.

Introduction

One of the most effective community leaders ever to put his personal imprint on any Australian city was Alderman Rex Pilbeam, mayor of Rockhampton from 1952 to 1982. Elected mayor for 10 consecutive three-year terms, Alderman Pilbeam came to office when Rockhampton was a large sprawling country town with an impressive town hall but few sealed roads, a costly, inadequate water supply, some sewerage, few amenities, high rates, and a huge debt incurred as a result of administrative incompetence in previous councils. Thirty years later, these problems were no more: Rockhampton had become an attractive, well-serviced, efficiently administered city with excellent amenities and relatively little debt.

Rex Pilbeam was born in Longreach in October 1907, but attended primary school at Emu Park (outside Rockhampton). He then completed two years of secondary school in Rockhampton, where his Junior Public Examination results placed him in the top 50 students out of some 1300 in the state. Accepting an offer

of employment in the Queensland public service he spent the next 19 years first in the Public Curator's Office, then the Justice Department, and finally the Queensland Housing Commission in Brisbane. During this time Rex acquired public accountancy and secretarial qualifications by correspondence, obtaining excellent results in a number of subjects.

Married early at the age of 20 years, Rex and his wife Barbara (nee Rose) had two sons whom they reared in Brisbane. For recreation Rex read voraciously; played tennis, cricket and table-tennis fixtures; single-handedly revived the moribund Brisbane Debating Society; and possessing a fine baritone voice, took singing lessons from Leonard Francis, one of Brisbane's foremost singing teachers. Encouraged by Francis, Rex was thinking of leaving the public service for a career as a professional singer, when Australia became embroiled in war.

World War II changed his life. Five years' overseas service in the army, during which he rose to the rank of warrant officer, broadened his horizons in various ways. Realising that regulations and red tape were hampering organisational effectiveness, he displayed a flair for obtaining essential supplies despite the stultifying military procedures designed for peacetime. After the war he escaped what he now experienced as the stifling public service atmosphere and moved to Warwick. There he bought a public accountancy practice, became Secretary of the Warwick Agricultural Society and used his professional and organising skills to turn the ailing Warwick rodeo into a considerable success.

Appointed Secretary of the Rockhampton Agricultural Society from January 1949 with the right of private practice as a public accountant, he made a similar success of that city's previously unsuccessful rodeo, and quickly became prominent in other community work. He stood for the mayoralty as an Independent in June 1952 at the urging of a number of prominent citizens, and won handsomely: a feature of this election was Rex Pilbeam's imaginative, attention-catching style of campaigning.

Enter the 'Controversial Character'

The print media in Australia began to treat Rex Pilbeam as a controversial character from 8 June 1953, one year into his first term as mayor, when his former secretary, with whom he had terminated a brief affair, shot and almost killed him. The bullet lodged in the spinal muscle behind his eleventh rib, where it stayed for the rest of his life. During the subsequent trial the police testified that following her arrest, Jean Francis Jennings admitted trying to murder the mayor, adding: 'I know he's poison, he's poison for me, but, oh, what sweet poison' (*Morning Bulletin* 1953b). The jury found her guilty of attempted murder, with a strong recommendation for mercy. The judge imposed a two-year suspended jail sentence. Rockhampton's press reported all this circumspectly with a discreetly captioned initial report of a mere six column-inches tucked away in a remote spot on page 4 (*Morning Bulletin* 1953a) with the subsequent trial proceedings (*Morning Bulletin* 1953b) relegated to page 5. By contrast, the metropolitan press (especially the tabloid *Brisbane*

Telegraph, which broke the news each time) predictably reacted with banner headlines and front-page, lead articles from the outset (*Brisbane Telegraph* 1953a, 1953b); while the broadsheet *Courier-Mail* (1953a), though a little more sedate in its treatment, still afforded the initial report front-page prominence, with the subsequent report of the trial (*Courier-Mail* 1953b) prominently spread over page 3.

The day after sentencing, Rex Pilbeam effectively placed himself on trial by the community: he resigned as mayor and announced his candidacy for re-election so that his fellow citizens might say whether or not he should continue as mayor. No one asked him to do this, and in the morally censorious atmosphere of a large Queensland country town in the early 1950s, few conceded him any chance of re-election. Win he did, however, against some impressive competition, but with a reduced majority.

These events paved the way for the Brisbane and national media to treat some of the long-serving Rockhampton mayor's doings and sayings as newsworthy. In 1976, for instance, he insisted that a newly married library assistant leave Rockhampton City Council's service to make way for an unmarried, unemployed female. For that he was widely criticised, lampooned as reactionary and dubbed 'Tyrannosaurus Rex' in one scathing article. Although the local community generally supported his concern for untrained, young people unable to get jobs, the media further afield usually presented him after that as something of an uncouth buffoon and figure of fun (Butler 1983).

The reality was otherwise. As former Rockhampton Deputy Town Clerk (later, Queensland Local Government Commissioner) Greg Hoffman remarked, 'At heart he was as soft as warm butter.... Publicly he was all bluff and bluster, and he had the talent and skill to carry the act off; but he needed people around him all the time' (Hoffman 1986). Former City Engineer Arnold Philp (1988) added that the mayor was 'a very good social mixer, who could take his place in any gathering.'

Marshalling Support in Council and Community

When he became mayor of Rockhampton in 1952, Alderman Pilbeam chaired a council in which he had one vote. A continuing problem, then, was to mobilise enough aldermanic votes for his policies in order to fulfil his campaign pledges. During his first two terms of office, most opposition came from Labor aldermen, who caucused and voted as one on each issue before the council. Other aldermen were 'Independents' and voted accordingly. The Independents generally supported the mayor's policies, but the mayor spent much time 'twisting arms' - arguing, cajoling, promising and so on - to be sure of their vote. On vital issues, he would campaign for his view in the community at large, lobbying both press and opinion leaders, and would urge citizens to attend the relevant council meeting to hear the debate. Such tactics often succeeded, but the mayor finally decided to fight fire with fire by forming his own team to contest council elections. The new Civic Independent Group won Rockhampton's 1961 municipal elections and thereafter usually delivered the votes the mayor needed for his policies.

Continuing community support for an elected leader and his team is not automatic. Stocks of community goodwill must be replenished frequently - something that Mayor Pilbeam achieved by fulfilling election promises and being willing to undertake any kind of work - including vigorous physical work - in initiating and supporting voluntary community activities. An ardent believer in voluntary, do-it-yourself community effort, he would probably have agreed with the Chinese sage Lao Tse, who observed that when the best leader's work is done, the people say, 'We have done it ourselves' (Lin Yutang 1948: 114).

The mayor's leadership was crucial to the success of many community projects. After studying decision-making processes, patterns of community influence, and organisational affiliations in Rockhampton in the early to middle 1960s, Halliwell (1964: 146) concluded:

The Town Council, the Mayor and Aldermen were found to play a central part in most community matters. The aldermen lent support and took formal leadership in a wide range of associations and activities. The Mayor was a key figure in community life.

The same author, after emphasising the mayor's character and determination, added:

It is, however, not suggested that the Mayor is all-powerful. This is in fact not the case. Both in economic and in social welfare matters he has been successfully opposed.... Nevertheless, he is undoubtedly the key figure in the leadership subsystem (Halliwell 1964:148).

Mayoral Role and Corporate Approach

The incoming mayor in June 1952 encountered a lethargic bureaucracy headed by a town clerk about to retire and a dominant, long-serving city engineer within five years of retirement. The challenge for the mayor was to transform the bureaucracy into a responsive machine that delivered high-quality services quickly and economically. In the event, Mayor Pilbeam's instincts, administrative experience in the public service, accounting/secretarial qualifications and wartime experience in overcoming red tape all combined to make him a 'hands on' manager who knew that plans and policies come to nought unless properly implemented.

The city's newly appointed town clerk at first contested but eventually conceded the mayor's right to be a 'hands on' manager. He also became the mayor's ally in the struggle for change, which had to percolate through all levels of the organisation - especially the inefficient Works Department. Radical change, however, cannot be achieved by simple *fiat*. A city engineer nearing retirement is unlikely to alter his entrenched attitudes and habits. Moreover, altered work patterns and habits could not be expected overnight from the council's day labour force. Politics, as Max Weber truly said, is a strong and slow boring of hard boards.

Gradually, as senior officers retired or moved on, Mayor Pilbeam appointed

outstanding replacements who shared his vision and infectious enthusiasm. Hence, by the end of his second three-year term he was surrounded by loyal, enthusiastic and efficient senior officials who were providing the city with better value for money.

As a professional accountant Rex quickly recognised the council's parlous financial condition. One cause of the situation lay in the traditional 'scattergun' approach to constructing and maintaining unsealed roads: the workforce was constantly patching up one unsealed road after another and not constructing durable, sealed roads needing little maintenance. Moreover, no previous mayor or council had ever systematically thought through the city's infrastructure needs and then designed a comprehensive programme to satisfy them.

Mayor Pilbeam therefore set about imposing a unifying vision on the council's chaotic arrangements and piecemeal activities. In consultation with senior officers, he made an inventory of what had to be done, insisting that roads, drainage, water supply, sewerage, and parks be accorded the highest priority. As a corollary, every project was planned and organised as a *total package*.

The Pilbeam approach is what management authorities now call 'corporate planning'. Rex's insistence on clear objectives and priorities systematically planned and integrated, anticipated what today is widely recognised as the best method of managing most enterprises. All council departments had to operate within this framework: rather than 'do their own thing', they now had to blend their activities with the council's overall goals and objectives.

Mayor and Parliamentarian

In 1960 Mayor Pilbeam stood for Parliament and won as the Liberal Party candidate for Rockhampton South. Thus began the most hectic period of his career, during which he shuttled between Rockhampton and Brisbane playing the dual role of mayor and member of the Queensland Legislative Assembly. His decision to stand for parliament was prompted by a belief that Rockhampton's claims to government largesse had been repeatedly overridden in favour of other centres whose pork-barrelling champions in Parliament could lobby ministers directly. The advantage of Rex's remaining as mayor, despite the workload, was that with his crusading enthusiasm for Rockhampton, his intimate knowledge of the city, and direct access to the ministry, he was ideally placed to press Rockhampton's claims.

For a flamboyant, extroverted politician, the mayor said little in Parliament. He was forever chasing benefits for his city and constituents in ministers' offices, private secretaries' offices, departmental heads' offices, and elsewhere. His zeal for nosing out little-known state subsidy schemes, for instance, enabled him to get Pilbeam Drive, a development road from Rockhampton to the top of Mount Archer, built completely at state government expense in the mid-1960s.

Other successes that Mayor Pilbeam had as member for Rockhampton South included construction of a new railway station, which was built purely because of his lobbying. During his fourth (1969) election campaign there was, as city historian

Lorna McDonald (1983: 138) observes,

...a flurry of government spending in Rockhampton in the first quarter of 1969 ...[as] a form of political insurance. New buildings included aerodrome extensions, the SGIO Building, the Department of Primary Industries on Yeppoon Road and extensive work at the CIAE while plans for two-million-dollar extensions to the General Hospital were announced.

Rockhampton South voters opted for youthful Labor challenger Keith Wright anyway and the stream of state government benefits dwindled accordingly. The mayor, however, continued to lobby his former parliamentary colleagues whenever he was in Brisbane. Thus he persuaded Main Roads Minister Hinze in the mid-1970s to include an item missing from his capital works program - a much needed second bridge over the Fitzroy River. The bridge was completed in 1980 at a cost to the government of \$11.35 million. Without the mayor's intervention, the city would certainly have waited at least another five years for its bridge.

Solving the Water Supply Problem

Mayor Pilbeam's greatest legacy to his city was undoubtedly solving the water supply problem. This, in turn, was the key to expanding the sewerage system and meeting the needs of residential and industry growth. Rockhampton has a low rainfall, but is sited on a beautiful, slow-flowing river - the Fitzroy. Tidal influence carried salt water a long way up the river, preventing the river from becoming a cheap source of domestic water. Hence, the city's water supply had been pumped from distant Yaamba since 1926 and operating costs, burdensome maintenance costs, impending increases in capital costs, and the associated debt had all contributed to the city's financial problems before Pilbeam's election as mayor. No human settlement can become a large, prosperous city if it lacks an assured and inexpensive supply of pure water; and long-held expert engineering opinion was that a barrage across the river could exacerbate floods and divert the river from its course across the residential area of south Rockhampton. But Mayor Pilbeam stubbornly refused to accept that a viable solution to the city's water supply problem could not be devised.

In the late 1950s, under strong mayoral pressure, the mayor's newly appointed, hand-picked city engineer, Arnold Philp, began work on this problem. Philp, although a civil engineer, not a hydrologist, completed an analysis that indicated the feasibility of constructing a barrage across the river. Armed with this analysis, the mayor commenced a one-man campaign to have the Local Government Department join in funding the project. Impressed with Philp's work, the Local Government Department in the early 1960s commissioned the Queensland University's Civil Engineering Department to conduct rigorous tests using a scale model of the river and the proposed barrage. In March, 1963 the University reported after thorough

testing that a barrage to prevent tidal saltwater from penetrating the fresh river water could be safely built.

This was an extraordinary technical breakthrough, with great long-term financial benefits. Now the river itself would bring fresh water into the heart of the city. Mayor Pilbeam initially opted to construct the barrage and new treatment works in three years. Admittedly, the plan would strain council resources but the longer-term savings, he argued from his professional accounting standpoint, would justify the effort. Lengthy negotiations with Deputy Premier and Treasurer Tom Hiley and Coordinator-General Sir James Holt, however, forced the mayor to accept a four-year construction period, and the barrage was eventually completed in 1971. This project provided the tropical city with the lifeblood to underpin its greening, beautification and growth. Without the barrage, Rockhampton could not have sustained even half its current population.

Rescuing Port Alma

By the end of World War II the north-south coastal rail link, which secured the future of Brisbane as a port, had seriously damaged Rockhampton's trade. The trade of central Queensland was inadequate to enable both Rockhampton and Gladstone to expand, and Gladstone was emerging the clear winner (Lewis 1978: 237). Port Alma was seemingly destined never to earn enough surpluses to allow the Rockhampton Harbour Board to clear its debt.

By the end of Mayor Pilbeam's first term in 1955, Rockhampton's river port was also in decline. Rockhampton City Council had traditionally championed the river port, 64 kilometres from the mouth of the Fitzroy, against the competing deep-water facility at Port Alma. Already, however, containerisation and other developing technologies had rendered Rockhampton's river port unsuitable for future trade and tipped the balance in Port Alma's favour.

In 1959, an inquiry by a committee of state government officials recommended that one wharf be constructed at Port Alma and that no further developmental work be undertaken for 10 years, or until more construction was clearly justified. For its part the council at the mayor's behest had reconsidered its traditional hostility to Port Alma. Arguing that a deep-water port was essential to the future of Rockhampton and its hinterland, the council pressed the government to construct three wharves, not one as recommended by the committee. A sceptical government finally agreed when Mayor Pilbeam, on behalf of an evenly divided council, offered to guarantee the harbour board's future loan indebtedness up to a limit of \$90,000 per annum. The arrangement was an important event in the saga of the ongoing rivalry between Rockhampton and Gladstone. It was in fact incorporated in a statute: *The Rockhampton Harbour Board and the Council of the City of Rockhampton Act of 1960*.

Meanwhile a road from Bajool (south of Rockhampton) to Port Alma was built in 1958 at a cost of \$500,000. From then on, the council carried much of the burden of updating the port. The harbour board's annual report for 1971-72 showed

receipts of \$285,372, and expenditures of \$354,954, almost all of which was spent on loan redemption and interest. The port's debts were incurred mainly as a result of the additional wharves and other facilities provided (e.g. a container crane) for shipping meat. The report also showed that the council was subsidising the port to the full extent of the \$90,000 per annum guaranteed in the agreement.

After the 1979 local government elections, Mayor Pilbeam began involving the council more closely with port management and the harbour board than was the case with any other Queensland port authority. Indeed, the mayor claimed that the only way to make Port Alma a success was for the Rockhampton City Council to assume full responsibility for its administration. That suggestion, however, was never acted on. Instead, the harbour board was corporatised in 1995 as a government-owned corporation under legislation enacted in 1993 and 1994. The Rockhampton Port Authority (2002) administers Port Alma, reporting an operating profit in 2000-01, but an operating loss (including a substantial assets writedown) in 2000-02, due to reduced exports of frozen beef.

Frugal Management and Progressive Debt Reduction

In line with Rex Pilbeam's views on community self-help, his approach to providing an Olympic swimming pool was to visit every home in Rockhampton and persuade residents that a municipal pool was essential to a tropical city. During each visit, he asked people to put their spare change in the money-box he supplied: in due course money-boxes would be collected and the proceeds used to construct the pool. The council subsequently constructed the pool, borrowing only £20,000 to defray the cost of a diving tower and wading pool in the Memorial Pool complex. Pilbeam argued that apart from minimising debt, this process gave citizens a sense of ownership and increased pride in the city. Similarly, an aged persons retirement village, known as Talbot Estate, was gradually built up through voluntary annual contributions collected by the mayor personally by 'button holing' residents in the streets of the city at Christmas time (Butler 1983: 7). In addition his personal fundraising efforts on behalf of a residential college for the (then) Capricornia Institute of Advanced Education (CIAE) in the mid-1970s were commemorated in 1976 by naming the dining hall and administrative centre 'Pilbeam Hall'.

Mayor Pilbeam's combination of frugal management, do-it-yourself projects, appeals to the wealthy citizens to contribute private funds for special projects, full utilisation of commonwealth and state subsidies, and systematic planning, enabled him to achieve conspicuously successful *cost-effective* outcomes. Table 1 shows that while Rockhampton in 1952 (when Pilbeam became mayor) collected the highest revenue *per capita* of any of the major provincial cities, was one of the costliest cities in terms of administrative overheads, and had the highest debt *per capita*, it had become the lowest in these respects (except for debt *per capita*) when Mayor Pilbeam departed as mayor 30 years later. (Toowoomba at that time had the lowest *per capita* debt, but it lagged behind all other major Queensland cities in 1982 in the condition of its roads, and in the quantity and quality of its amenities.)

Table 1. Comparison of Various Performance Indicators for Five Queensland Cities at ten-yearly intervals, from 30 June 1952 to 30 June 1982 (inclusive).

	Rock-hampton	Toowoomba	Ipswich	Townsville	Cairns
30 June 1952					
Properties with reticulated water (%)	90.3	82.4	72.3	75.1	83.1
Properties with Sewerage (%)	65.7	33.7	43.5	41.8	0.0
Revenue <i>per capita</i>	£13.7	£9.3	£12.6	£11.5	£10.1
Administrative costs <i>per capita</i>	£1.06	£0.78	£0.84	£1.01	£0.74
Admin costs as % of receipts	7.7	8.3	6.7	8.8	7.4
Debt <i>per capita</i>	£44.1	£17.3	£31.9	£33.4	£13.1
30 June 1962					
Properties with reticulated water (%)	95.9	91.7	88.3	88.1	104.1 ¹
Properties with Sewerage (%)	78.6	56.5	52.0	49.3	10.2
Revenue <i>per capita</i>	£21.0	£24.2	£20.5	£26.0	£29.8
Administrative costs <i>per capita</i>	£0.77	£1.35	£1.71	£1.36	£1.43
Admin costs as % of receipts	3.7	5.6	8.3	5.2	4.8
Debt <i>per capita</i>	£60.6	£63.3	£58.7	£68.6	£53.4
30 June 1972					
Properties with reticulated water (%)	91.1	98.2	84.3	94.0	95.2
Properties with Sewerage (%)	84.4	87.8	60.1	79.1	37.2
Revenue <i>per capita</i>	\$85.6 ¹	\$67.5	\$83.3	\$116.7	\$105.1
Administrative costs <i>per capita</i>	\$7.05	\$6.70	\$8.55	\$9.56	\$12.77
Admin costs as % of receipts	8.2	9.9	10.3	8.2	12.1
Debt <i>per capita</i>	\$270.3 ³	\$226.7	\$201.5	\$299.5	\$216.6
30 June 1982					
Properties with reticulated water (%)	97.6	92.1	86.4	74.5	90.0
Properties with Sewerage (%)	94.4	90.1	80.4	74.2	92.2
Revenue <i>per capita</i>	\$211.4	\$257.8	\$322.2	\$367.0	\$386.5
Administrative costs <i>per capita</i>	\$11.4	\$17.0	\$25.0	\$24.2	\$31.6
Admin costs as % of receipts	5.4	6.6	7.7	6.6	8.1
Debt <i>per capita</i>	\$561.2	\$510.0	\$624.6	\$922.1	\$792.0

Source: Derived from ABS, *Statistics of Queensland Part E*; and *Local Government Queensland*.

Notes:

¹ This percentage was produced as a result of an erroneous figure in the number of water connections shown for Cairns.

² This figure reflects the short-term impact of rapid repayment of the loans for the barrage.

³ This amount includes part of the outstanding debt incurred for the barrage.

Providing Cultural and Other Facilities

The mayor's early emphasis on Rockhampton's economic infrastructure did not blind him to the need to provide for the cultural and other recreational pursuits of Rockhampton citizens. A new library was built in north Rockhampton in 1971 with the council, as usual, taking full advantage of state government subsidies for both library buildings and library services. A second library was built in the central business district six years later. A second botanic gardens devoted to native plant life was commenced in 1976 (opened in 1988). New parks were established and facilities such as cricket grounds, a second Olympic pool and a velodrome were also constructed. Other important contributions to the cultural enrichment of the city included the beautiful Pilbeam Theatre, the Art Gallery, the enlargement of the city's art collection, and the development of the unique Walter Reid Cultural Centre (McDonald 1983: 460).

This latter facility illustrates the mayor's ability to recognise and seize an opportunity to satisfy a longstanding community need with a creative solution. The Walter Reid Cultural Centre was formerly a warehouse which the mayor persuaded the council to acquire in 1975 for the bargain basement price of \$160,000. The council then set about renovating the centrally located three-floor building at a total cost of \$340,000. The result is an arts and crafts centre with 6,400 square metres of floor space that accommodates many groups (including theatre, camera, lapidary, pottery, spinning and weaving, painting, orchestral and choral) which have added their own renovations and special features to the areas allotted them. The space is leased at a nominal or nil charge, depending upon the nature of the group, and whether arts and craft skills are taught to young people. Hence, the council was able to provide incentives to groups to attract young citizens to their activities. The facility is one of which the council is justifiably proud.

When someone is in office for as long as Rex Pilbeam it might be expected that Acton's 'law of corruption' (Tower tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely') would apply. The corruption that flourished in Queensland in the scandal-ridden Bjelke-Petersen era illustrates the operation of Acton's 'law'. In fact, no whiff of scandal ever touched the Pilbeam administration in Rockhampton, despite local government's vulnerability to corruption in land development matters. Despite the long hours he worked, Mayor Pilbeam accepted no parliamentary perks such as annual overseas junkets, he drew only a modest mayoral allowance, and later a modest mayoral salary only after he was defeated in the parliamentary elections of 1969. Even the mayor's most vocal critics readily conceded the selfless nature of his devotion to Rockhampton and its people. As one perceptive journalist wrote at the end of the Pilbeam mayoralty, 'Perhaps more than anyone else in local government anywhere, he showed what one perceptive, dynamic and ruthless personality can do. He helped a battered, slumping city get its head up again and keep it up' (Butler 1983: 7).

Following his departure as mayor, Rex Pilbeam was drafted by fellow citizens as unpaid fundraiser for a succession of worthy causes. For example, he raised tens of thousands of dollars for the Leichhardt Rowing Club, the Rockhampton

Ambulance Brigade's new centre, and the Red Cross Society's new building. Eventually, in 1992, at the age of 85 years, he ceased this work in order to nurse his ailing wife, who died in January 1994.

Suetonius tells us that Augustus Caesar, reviewing a lifetime in public office, once remarked: 'I found Rome a city of sun-dried bricks; I leave her clothed in marble'. The Pilbeam legacy to Rockhampton was less spectacular than this, perhaps - but more substantial, in that Rockhampton would have stagnated without the Fitzroy Barrage. Indeed to solve the domestic water supply problem, expand other basic services, protect the Port Alma lifeline, and provide for the city's cultural and recreational needs while *reducing* the relative tax *and* debt burdens was the extraordinary achievement of an extraordinary mayor. Rockhampton's transformation during the Pilbeam era was more dramatic than anything accomplished in that period in Queensland's other regional cities. No other city in Australia owes so much to the efforts of one community leader as Rockhampton owes to former Mayor Pilbeam.

A prophet is usually without honour in his own country. The visionary former mayor is diametrically different in this respect, as in so much else. Rex Pilbeam, a sometime figure of fun elsewhere, is almost revered in his own city, even though the extent of his contribution is not fully appreciated even there. Nevertheless, as prominent Rockhampton businessman and community leader Les Duthie declared publicly some years ago: 'His name will remain in the annals of the history of Rockhampton for all time, which he so richly deserves'. Truly, in Rockhampton, one can say of Rex Pilbeam: 'If you seek his monument, look around you!'

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